



National Transportation Safety Board

The Chairman's Corner

www.ntsb.gov



Friday, July 15, 2005



Motorcoach collision with Chevrolet Suburban, Hewitt, Texas, February 14, 2003. Red arrow notes location of Suburban.

Roadway Design, Wet Pavement, and Minimum Tread Depths Caused Motorcoach Accident

On Tuesday, the Board adopted a highway report on the crash of a motorcoach near Hewitt, Texas, on February 14, 2003, stating that roadway design, wet pavement, and the condition of the tires were factors that led to the crash. Seven people were killed when the motorcoach ran off the road, crossed the median, and collided with a Chevrolet Suburban traveling in the oncoming lane. Heavy rain, fog, and haze in the area had reduced visibility at the time of the accident.

The Board's investigation determined that the wet pavement at the accident site, combined with roadway geometry, and a speed limit that exceeded the road's design speed, did not provide drivers with enough time to react and stop their vehicles, or avoid a collision. The Board recommended that the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) issue guidance to its field offices describing the inadequate stopping sight distance that can occur on roadways where hills exist along with low coefficients of friction and speeds higher than the design speed.

The Board also identified the benefits of using variable speed limit signs to reduce speeds in inclement weather and further recommended guidance from FHWA on their use.

The Board also made recommendations for research into tire tread depth on commercial vehicles, and revision of the Texas Department of Transportation Wet Weather Accident Reduction Program. A synopsis of the report is currently available on the Board's website.

Acting Chairman Meets with Investigators from Nigeria

Acting Chairman Mark Rosenker met with the Director and Assistant Director of the Republic of Nigeria, Federal Ministry of Aviation Accident Investigation and Prevention Bureau. Mr. Osaka, the Director, and Mr. Faminu, the Assistant Director, were at headquarters being briefed by Dennis Jones of the NTSB about the Board's operations. Earlier, Rosenker visited the British Embassy to sign the condolence book and officially convey the Safety Board's sympathies to the government and people of Great Britain.

Photo (from left to right): Dennis Jones, Chief of Regional Operations and General Aviation, Angus Osaka, Director, Acting Chairman Mark Rosenker, and Remi Faminu, Assistant Director.



Chairman Designate Engleman Conners focused on shared challenges that airports face for both aviation safety and security issues. Also pictured are (from left to right): Mr. Scott Yohe of Delta Air Lines, Ms. Woodie Woodward of the FAA, and Mr. Kevin McGarr of the Canadian Air Transport Security Authority.

Chairman Designate Addresses International Audience

NTSB Chairman Designate Ellen Engleman Conners addressed an international audience of aviation community and government executives from over 20 countries during the International Airport Security Conference and Trade Show in Dublin, Ireland. During her remarks, Ms. Engleman Conners stated that airport managers need to be prepared to adequately and sensitively handle family assistance matters. "Whether it is an aviation safety accident or a security incident, your airport is a place where families will gather to seek information," she said. She further discussed the need for the security and safety communities to work together to ensure safe and secure aviation operations, applauded the Board's strong advocacy for full implementation of safety recommendations, and encouraged airport executives to be aware of the NTSB Academy's education and training courses on family assistance.

Rail Investigators Launch to Head-On Train Collision in Mississippi

The Office of Railroad, Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Investigations launched to the accident site near Anding, Mississippi, on July 10th. At approximately 4:15 a.m. Sunday morning, two Canadian National freight trains collided head-on, resulting in the death of one crew member and 3 crew members missing. A post-collision fire burned for several hours engulfing the locomotives and some freight cars.

Member Deborah Hersman accompanied the team of 9 led by Railroad Investigator-In Charge Mike Flanigan; Dave Watson, Mechanics; Cy Gura, Tracks and Signals; Steve Jenner, Survival Factors; Tom Lasseigne and Crystal Thomas, Hazardous Materials; Keith Holloway, Public Affairs; Jay Kivowitz, Operations; and George Cochran, Chicago Field Office Investigator.

At Ninth Anniversary of TWA800 Crash, NTSB Seeks FAA Action on Fuel Tank Flammability Recommendations



On July 12, 2005, the Board sent a letter to FAA Administrator Marion C. Blakey asking for a description of any short-term actions the FAA is contemplating in response to an urgent NTSB safety recommendation aimed at avoiding airliner fuel tank explosions similar to the one that downed TWA flight 800, which crashed nine years ago this Sunday, killing all 230 persons aboard. Five months after that crash, the NTSB issued two safety recommendations aimed at reducing flammable fuel/air mixtures on airliners. One recommended short-term actions in airplane operations that could immediately reduce the levels of these flammable mixtures, while the other called for design changes. Both recommendations were placed on the Board's Most Wanted list of safety improvements the following year.

Five years after the TWA crash, the NTSB participated in the investigation of another fuel tank explosion, this time of a Thai Airways 737-400 in Bangkok, Thailand, in March 2001. The airplane, which was sitting on the ground at the time, was completely destroyed, and a flight attendant was fatally injured. As in the

TWA crash, the presence of flammable fuel/air mixtures in the center wing tank was responsible for the accident.

There has been little action by the FAA in response to the Board's short-term recommendation. In 2000, the FAA concluded that operational changes that used ground-conditioned air instead of running the airplane's on-board air conditioning system while on the ground could reduce flammable fuel/air mixtures in center wing tanks, and requested its inspectors to encourage airlines to follow this procedure. However, the FAA did not require airlines to comply with this procedure.

"Fuel tank explosions are rare events," Acting Chairman Mark V. Rosenker said, "but as we learned in Thailand, TWA800 was not an isolated case. I urge the FAA to act quickly on our urgent recommendation to implement airline operational actions, including requiring ground conditioned air."

In announcing the Board's action, Acting Chairman Rosenker noted that the FAA had achieved significant success in eliminating potential ignition sources in a number of aircraft models. "However, it is disappointing 9 years after the tragedy of flight 800 that fuel tanks are as flammable today as they were in 1996, and particularly disheartening that the FAA has done almost nothing on this urgent recommendation."

The Board will review and evaluate the FAA's activities associated with these and other recommendations on its Most Wanted List at a meeting later this year.

Update on Most Wanted Safety Recommendations

Although most State legislatures have now adjourned, the eight States with year-round legislative sessions continue to act on the Safety Board's "Most Wanted" State recommendations.

The California State Legislature recently adopted legislation that triggers an alcohol assessment and sanctions for all drivers with a 0.15 percent or greater BAC. This would not have passed without help from our Hard Core Drinking Driver Coalition partners. Also in California, legislation expanding the use of ignition interlocks for DWI offenders has passed the Assembly and awaits full Senate debate.

Culminating two years of effort, Pennsylvania Governor Ed Rendell signed legislation establishing a flying while impaired by alcohol offense. The Wisconsin Assembly Natural Resources Committee has approved two recreational boating safety bills, requiring personal flotation device use and mandating boater education.

Advocacy staff already has begun preparations for the 2006 State legislative sessions by participating in both national and State-level meetings designed to find common ground with our allies. A broad range of national groups, including safety agencies, advocates, victims, insurers, prosecutors, treatment providers, and alcohol beverage producers, wholesalers, and retailers met and agreed upon effective impaired driving measures to be pursued.

To build public support for Safety Board recommendations, Acting Chairman Rosenker was interviewed on a Los Angeles morning talk radio show (Eric Hogue, AM 1380) on cell phone restrictions for teen drivers. He also is doing a video interview on alcohol impaired driving for the National District Attorneys Association.



Correction: Emily Hamburg is the new temp student employee in the Materials Laboratory. Our last issue mistakenly announced her with the same last name as Matt Hubbard, also a new student in the Lab.